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How to Write a Thesis in European Studies

I. Some Introductory Comments

1. You are in charge!

Writing a thesis is probably the most time consuming and complex project you ever approached. We provide you with some guidance in terms of its content as well as the time management and you can of course consult your supervisor individually on more specific questions. But: you are in charge of writing your thesis! From finding your supervisor over drawing up a realistic work plan to actually sitting down and writing something – this is your work and you are responsible for it. Make sure that you do not lose sight of the big picture and track your progress. Be pro-active if there are problems! Think ahead! Take into account that your supervisor is engaged in various activities other than your thesis and will not respond instantaneously 24/7 to every email you might send. Indeed, due to conferences and field work we are sometimes abroad and cannot be reached. Incorporate time for regular feedback into your schedule. Seek out your supervisor and possibly other lecturers for advice on problems. Do not wait for the last minute for asking questions and submitting your proposal or draft versions. Allow for time for problems with gathering the necessary data, re-thinking of your theory, incorporating literature you have missed, and general revisions of the text.

2. Social science is a cumulative enterprise!

Your thesis requires you to produce an original work of research. However, social science is a cumulative enterprise. Thus, you are not being asked to venture into completely unknown territory or to re-invent the wheel! You are probably going to apply an existing theory to a new case (or combination of cases) or scrutinize how the interactions of several factors whose individual effects are well understood affect certain outcomes. In other words, you are going to build on the work and ideas of others (whose work you should duly acknowledge). Think of your study as an apprenticeship. At the end of it you have to produce one piece of work showing that you can work like a social scientist. We are asking you to develop an argument about a theoretical claim to show that you can competently use the social scientists' toolbox. Just like an apprentice carpenter does not have to invent the hammer but has to know how to use it, you do not have to invent a completely new theory or method but have to know how to apply them!

3. Social science is about generating reliable knowledge!

Albert Einstein famously noted that '[t]he whole of science is nothing more than the refinement of everyday thinking'. Often (but not always!) the results in social sciences are identical to what you expected from the beginning based on common sense. The added value of using the scientific method in analyzing questions in the social sciences is that you know how reliable that knowledge is. Are your everyday hunches about relationships actually correct? What precisely is the connection between two real world phenomena? Do we really know how one affects the other? Research methodology is nothing more than rigorous and systematic thinking about these questions, but nothing less than a reliable guide through this tricky territory! This is true regardless of the specific format, research question or methodology of your thesis. It applies to case studies just as it applies to a statistical analysis! Because social science is a cumulative process (see above), finding out that there is no

(measurable) empirical relationship between two variables is a valuable finding if it builds on solid theory and sound methodology. In other words, if you do not find the expected relationship (or none at all), report it, try to explain it but do not hide it! Also, there is a value in knowing what we do not know.

4. There are trade-offs in research!

While preparing and writing your thesis you will make numerous choices. How many and which cases are you going to study? Are you going to use a cross-sectional or longitudinal research design? How are you going to measure your concepts? Often there is not one unique 'right' answer for a question or a perfect solution for a given problem. Choosing a larger number of cases might allow you to generalize your findings more easily but a smaller number of cases might allow you to study the causal effects more closely. One indicator might be closer to your theoretical construct, but another one is available for more cases. There are often trade-offs in research (just as in everything else in life)! Sometimes you can cleverly combine the relative merits of various choices or check whether having made a different choice would make a difference. Otherwise: justify your choices, acknowledge potential problems and limits, discuss their likely implications and move on.

5. Writing is a process!

The writing of a longer text is a process that includes several steps. You will need to think about your research question, write a proposal, structure your thesis and write an outline, decide on how to operationalize and measure your concepts, gather the data, analyze it and write your conclusions. However, this is not a strictly linear process. For example, after having written the part on how to measure your variables you might realize that the explanation of the concept in your theoretical part is incomplete. Similarly, after having done the analysis you might want to re-visit your theoretical part to make sure that you are highlighting the relevant consequences of your theory. Or you might find that your literature review unduly focuses on one literature strand which does not speak as directly to your question (and subsequently your findings) as you initially thought. Your thesis will also go through several draft stages as you refine your argument and incorporate comments from your supervisor.

II. Recommendations on Structure and Content of your Thesis

(check the Methodology Toolbox or the Thesis Teletop-site for a guide to readings on research methodology)

1. Introduction

In the introduction you set the scene for you thesis and explain to the reader what you are going to do in your thesis. In particular, you want to describe the empirical or theoretical puzzle you are interested in and motivate your research. In most cases you are going to apply a theory to a new case or set of cases. In some instances you will describe a novel fact and fit it into the existing theoretical and empirical literature. You need to explain to the reader why this is interesting and relevant. You should also summarize your research question, your theoretical approach, and your research strategy and give an outlook on your findings. What is it that you want to explain? How are you going to address this puzzle? Remember that you need to define a question rather than just naming a topic. A question will help you decide how to go about answering it (i.e., which theory, methods and data to use), a simple topic does not!

You should also 'locate' your thesis within the wider literature. How does your work relate to what others have done on related (or even identical) questions? What are the broader implications of your findings? In this section you can also integrate your literature review (alternatively, you can do it in the next one). In your literature review you are discussing the state of the art on a given question. What do we already know? Make sure to separate theory and evidence in this regard. Be aware of the difference between a summary of the literature and a literature review. In a summary you would simply list the main points of a given article or book, largely following the priorities and structure of the author. In a review your focus is on how an (parts of an) article or book help you to answer your question. Many texts you will use are not written with your question in mind, so you have to extract the relevant information from it and impose your own structure when representing your insights from your reading of the relevant literature.

2. Theory

In the theory party you outline your theoretical expectations with regard to the phenomenon that you are studying. You usually proceed from a relatively abstract general framework to specific hypotheses. Remember that social science is a cumulative process, hence you will most likely use and/or adopt existing theoretical work. In any case, you will have to explain the concepts involved in the theory and how they are related to each other. Do any of the existing theories give a plausible and probable account of the empirical situation described in section 1? If yes, then apply that as normal science. Apply the theory to your specific question and cases to generate testable hypotheses. If no, then you have a theoretical puzzle as well as an empirical one. A theoretical puzzle requires you to add to or adjust existing theories or create an entirely new one. If there are theoretical adjustments to be made, define the actors, interaction and the structure of their relationship. Are there specific variables that you feel are particularly important and that you want to focus your research on? These would be variables that you think are the most important explanatory factors in the empirical puzzle at hand. They should be included in your hypotheses. Be very explicit and clear about your theoretical expectations! You will usually describe one causal mechanism that you want to focus on and several alternative explanations for a given phenomenon that you are going to control for (insofar as this is possible). You can nicely sum up the relationship between your variables in a graph.

3. Research Methodology

In the methodology section you describe how you are going to empirically test your theoretical expectations (i.e., your hypothesis). This involves the question of case selection, your general research approach (e.g., single case study, comparative case study, and/or statistical analysis), and the measurement of your variables. You should describe this with the question in mind why and how your research strategy will result in valid and reliable results. You need to discuss these issues regardless of whether you are conducting a qualitative or quantitative study. With regard to measurement, you need to explain how your measurement relates to your theoretical concepts of interest (i.e., your dependent and independent variables). In some instances, there are several established ways of measuring a certain concept (i.e., measures of democracy). In that case you need to explain why you think that one of them is better suited for your purposes than others. Also, you might want to identify possible caveats due to the imperfect link between your theoretical concepts and the empirical indicator or due to data availability. Furthermore, you need to discuss your case selection and how this might influence your findings. This might include providing information on a larger set of cases (i.e., the whole universe of case to which you want to generalize) before focusing on a smaller subset.
Use diagrams and tables to highlight key points.

4. Data and Analysis

Before you proceed to the description of your data and the analysis, you should remind the reader what the expected relationship between the variables under scrutiny is. Describe the data you are going to use in your analysis using tables and diagrams where appropriate. Ideally, you want to test the variables you hypothesize (have identified as) are likely the most important explanatory factors. In a single case study you trace the hypothesized causal mechanism and pay close attention to other possibly relevant factors. You are likely to invoke counterfactuals in your interpretation of the evidence. In comparative case studies, you do this by showing cases where the variable is strong and present and where it is weak or absent and relate this to the strength/presence of the dependent variable. In large-N quantitative studies, you use statistical analysis to you show whether the hypothesized relationship exists, taking other (possibly intervening) variables into account. In comparative case studies, other variables should be as similar as possible, to control for their influence on the outcome. If this is not possible, you should make this explicit and discuss the consequences for the validity of your findings. Be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of your research design, methods and indicators. Use diagrams and tables to highlight key points.
Be careful to present not just the results themselves but also your interpretation of the results. At the end of this section you should explicitly discuss how your findings corroborate or falsify your hypotheses.

5. Conclusion

In your conclusion, you provide the answer to your research question and discuss its implications. Your also discuss the limits of your studies and note interesting findings or insights you came across besides your main results. Given the empirical evidence, can you suggest directions for a better explanation than the one we have? Are there any questions or cases that you find interesting that you or someone else could investigate beyond this piece of research? Why? Is it because these additional cases would reinforce our factual knowledge of the theoretical implications in more areas or time periods? Is it because there is room to improve the control variables? Is it because you have made some discoveries about how things work, but that after a full research report, there are still some unexplained factors?

Have a look at an article you liked and see how it is structured. Ask yourself why you can easily follow the argument in a well-written text!

III. Thesis Check-List

The following is a list of some of the things you might want to check before submitting your thesis to ensure a good result. It is written with an empirical study in mind. It does not claim to be an exhaustive list.

Introduction

- □ I clearly define my research question (question, not topic!) and spell out what it is that I want to study
- □ I discuss how my thesis relates to existing research
- □ I summarize my main arguments and findings

Theory

- □ I discuss how the existing literature applies to my research question (literature review, not summary!)
- □ I discuss the assumptions and concepts used in the theory
- □ I formulate one or several hypotheses which specify the theoretically expected causal relationship between my dependent and independent variables

Research Design and Measurement

- □ I provide sufficient information for a reader to critically evaluate or replicate my study
- □ I discuss my choice of research design
- □ I discuss my case selection
- □ I discuss how the theoretical concepts are measured
- □ I discuss possible limits of my measurement
- □ I use diagrams and tables where appropriate

Data and Analysis

- □ I describe the data to give my reader a good overview of the empirical content of my study
- □ I provide sufficient information for a reader to critically evaluate or replicate my study
- □ I explain how I interpret my findings
- □ I state whether or not my hypotheses have been corroborated
- □ I discuss the limits of my findings (e.g., threats to validity)
- □ I use tables and graphs where appropriate

Conclusion

- □ I give an answer to the research question posed at the beginning.
- □ I summarize what I did and how I did it.
- □ I relate my findings to the wider literature in my subfield and (where appropriate) discuss policy implications
- □ I discuss the limits of my study and (possibly) future research directions

Citing using the APA style for MB students

(this guide is based on the Wikipedia entry of the APA guide. This is NOT an original contribution). If you use EndNote or a similar program, this may be pretty useless, because it is done more or less automatically ***J***.
Changed to fit MB purposes by ***Henk van der Kolk***

1. General idea
The general idea of the APA style is that you make references in the main text (called reference citations) and a reference section at the end of the document in which all sources are listed alphabetically (using the first authors last name). APA style defines that the reference section may only include articles that are cited within the body of an article and should include all references made in the text. This is the distinction between a document having a Reference section and a bibliography, which may incorporate sources, which may have been read by the authors as background but not referred to or included in the body of a document.

2. Reference citations
How do I make in-text or reference citations to a book or journal article?
Reference citations in text are done using parenthetical referencing. Most usually, this involves enclosing the author's surname (without initials) and the date of publication within parentheses, separated by a comma, generally placed immediately after the reference or at the end of the sentence in which the reference is made (Author, Year).

Example: A recent study found a possible genetic cause of alcoholism (Pauling, 2005).

However, it is also common for the authors to be the subject or object of a sentence. In such a case only the year is in parenthesis.

Example: Pauling (2005) discovered a possible genetic cause of alcoholism.

In both cases of citation, author name(s) are always followed immediately by a year, and years are never presented without author name(s) immediately preceding it. In the case of a quotation, the page number is also included in the citation.
If direct quotes are used (and it is recommended you also do this if you cite a book and the reference is to very specific argument the same rules apply, the format being (Author, Year, Page Number).

Example: When asked why his behavior had changed so dramatically, Max simply said, "I think it's the reinforcement" (Pauling, 2004, p. 69).

If the publication is written by two authors, authors should be presented in order that they appear in the published article. If they are cited within closed parentheses, use the ampersand (&) between them. If not enclosed in parentheses then use expanded "and".

Example: A recent study found a possible genetic cause of alcoholism (Pauling & Liu, 2005).

Example: Pauling and Liu (2005) discovered a possible genetic cause of alcoholism.

With three to five authors, the first reference to an article includes all authors.

Example: A recent study found a possible genetic cause of alcoholism (Pauling, Liu, & Guo, 2005).

Example: Pauling, Liu, and Guo (2005) conducted a study that discovered a possible genetic cause of alcoholism.

Subsequent citations in the same document may refer to the article by the principal author only plus "et al." However, all authors must be present in the references section (see below). In *et al.*, *et* should not be followed by a period.

Example: Pauling et al. (2005) discovered a possible genetic cause of alcoholism.

Example: A recent study found a possible genetic cause of alcoholism (Pauling et al., 2005).

With six or more authors, the correct format is (First Author et al., Year). In the reference section, all six authors' names should be included.

How do I make references to multiple publications of one author (or a constant combination of authors)?
If an author has multiple publications that you wish to cite, you use a comma to separate the years of publication in chronological order (oldest to most recent). If the publications occur in the same year, the *Publication Manual* recommends using suffixes a, b, c, etc. (note that corresponding letters should be used in the reference list, and these references should be ordered alphabetically by title).

> Example: Recent studies have found a possible genetic cause of alcoholism (Pauling, 2004, 2005a, 2005b).
>
> Example: Pauling (2004, 2005a, 2005b) has conducted studies that have discovered a possible genetic cause of alcoholism

How do I refer to several publications at the same time?
Follow the rules for one author above, and use a semicolon to separate articles. Citation should first be in alphabetical order of the author, then chronological.

> Example: Recent studies found a possible genetic cause of alcoholism (Alford, 1995; Pauling, 2004, 2005; Sirkis, 2003)

What if the author and/or date are unknown (mainly in electronic sources, see below)?
If no date is given use the abbreviation "n.d." (for "no date").
Unknown Author: If the work does not have an author, cite the source by (a part of its) its title. In this case, titles of books and reports are italicized; titles of articles and chapters are in quotation marks.

> Example: Another study of students and research decisions discovered that students succeeded with tutoring ("Tutoring and APA," n.d.).

Note: In the rare case the "Anonymous" is used for the author, treat it as the author's name (Anonymous, 2001). In the reference list, use the name Anonymous as the author.
Organization as an Author: If the author is an organization or a government agency, mention the organization in the signal phrase or in the parenthetical citation the first time you cite the source.

> Example: According to the American Psychological Association (2000),...

If the organization has a well-known abbreviation, include the abbreviation in brackets the first time the source is cited and then use only the abbreviation in later citations.

> Example: First citation: (Mothers Against Drunk Driving [MADD], 2000); Second citation: (MADD, 2000)

3. Reference list
The APA style guide prescribes that the *Reference* section, bibliographies and other lists of names should be accumulated by surname first, and mandates inclusion of surname prefixes. For example, "Martin de Rijke" should be sorted as "De Rijke, M." and "Saif Al Falasi" should be sorted as "Al-Falasi, S." (The preference for Arabic names now is to hyphenate the prefix so that it remains with the surname.)

3.1 Print sources

Book by one author
Sheril, R. D. (1956). *The terrifying future: Contemplating color television*. San Diego: Halstead.

Book by two authors or more

Smith, J., & Peter, Q. (1992). *Hairball: An intensive peek behind the surface of an enigma.* Hamilton, ON: McMaster University Press.

Article in an edited book
Mcdonalds, A. (1993). Practical methods for the apprehension and sustained containment of supernatural entities. In G. L. Yeager (Ed.), *Paranormal and occult studies: Case studies in application* (pp. 42–64). London: OtherWorld Books.

Article in a journal paginated separately
Crackton, P. (1987). The Loonie: God's long-awaited gift to colourful pocket change? *Canadian Change*, *64* (7), 34–37.

Article in a journal with continuous pagination
Rottweiler, F. T., & Beauchemin, J. L. (1987). Detroit and Narnia: Two foes on the brink of destruction. *Canadian/American Studies Journal, 54*, 66-146.

Article in a weekly magazine
Henry, W. A., III. (1990, April 9). Making the grade in today's schools. *Time, 135*, 28–31.

Article in a newspaper
Wrong, M. (2005, August 17). "Never Gonna Give You Up" says Mayor. *Toronto Sol*, p. 4.

Government document
Revenue Canada. (2001). *Advanced gouging: Manual for employees* (MP 65–347/1124). Ottawa: Minister of Immigration and Revenue.

3.2 Electronic sources

If you have just found the printed article on the internet (as a PDF file for example), you just add [electronic version] after the title of the article:

> Example: Marlowe, P., Spade, S., & Chan, C. (2001). Detective work and the benefits of colour versus black and white [Electronic version]. *Journal of Pointless Research, 11*, 123–124.

(1) Include the DOI number if available:
Since online materials can potentially change URL's, APA recommends providing a Digital Object Identifier (DOI), when it is available, as opposed to the URL. DOI's are an attempt to provide stable, long-lasting links for online articles. They are unique to their documents and consist of a long alphanumeric code. Many-but not all-publishers will provide an article's DOI on the first page of the document.
Note that some online bibliographies provide an article's DOI but may "hide" the code under a button which may read "Article" or may be an abbreviation of a vendors name like "CrossRef" or "PubMed." This button will usually lead the user to the full article which will include the DOI. Find DOI's from print publications or ones that go to dead links with CrossRef.org's "DOI Resolver," which is displayed in a central location on their home page.

> Example: Brownlie, D. (2000) Toward effective poster presentations: An annotated bibliography. *European Journal of Marketing, 41*(11/12), 1245-1283. doi:10.1108/03090560710821161

For other electronic references, websites, and online articles without DOI, APA Style asserts some basic rules, including:
(2) Otherwise, give the URL and the access date
(3) all other relevant APA style details for the source

Internet article based on a print source (Use only if formatting differs from original)
Marlowe, P., Spade, S., & Chan, C. (2001). Detective work and the benefits of colour versus black and white. *Journal of Pointless Research, 11*, 123–124. Retrieved October 25, 2007, from http://www.pointlessjournal.com/colour_vs_black_and_white.html

Article in an Internet-only journal
Blofeld, E. S. (1994, March 1). Expressing oneself through Persian cats and modern architecture. *Felines & Felons*, 4, Article 0046g. Retrieved October 3, 1999, from http://journals.f+f.org/spectre/vblofeld-0046g.html

Article in an Internet-only newsletter
Paradise, S., Moriarty, D., Marx, C., Lee, O. B., Hassel, E., Bradford, J., et al. (1957, July). Portrayals of fictional characters in reality-based popular writing: Project update. *Off the Beaten Path*, 7 (3). Retrieved October 3, 1999, from http://www.newsletter.offthebeatenpath.news/otr/complaints.html

Stand-alone Internet document, no author identified, no date
What I did today. (n.d.). Retrieved August 21, 2002, from http://www.cc.mystory.life/blog/didtoday.html [Fictional entry.]

Document available on university program or department website (note that APA spells website Web site)
Rogers, B. (2078). *Faster-than-light travel: What we've learned in the first twenty years.* Retrieved August 24, 2079, from *Mars University, Institute for Martian Studies* Web site, http://www.eg.spacecentraltoday.mars/university/dept.html [Fictional entry.]

Electronic copy of a journal article, three to five authors, retrieved from database
Costanza, G., Seinfeld, J., Benes, E., Kramer, C., & Peterman, J. (1993). Minutiæ and insignificant observations from the nineteen-nineties. *Journal about Nothing, 52,* 475–649. Retrieved October 31, 1999, from *NoTHINGJournals* database. [Fictional entry.]

E-mail or other personal communication (cite in text only)
(A. Monterey, personal communication, September 28, 2001)

Book on CD
Nix, G. (2002). *Lirael, Daughter of the Clayr* [CD]. New York: Random House/Listening Library.

Book on tape
Nix, G. (2002). *Lirael, Daughter of the Clayr* [Cassette Recording No. 1999-1999-1999]. New York: Random House/Listening Library.

Movie
Gilby, A. (Producer), & Schlesinger, J. (Director). (1995). *Cold comfort farm* [Motion picture]. Universal City, CA: MCA Universal Home Video.